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CHILDREN'S CLOTHING

Within the snow-hut or tent a baby sprawled stark naked on bedskins, or wore only a caribou-fur diaper, covered at times with a second diaper of either caribou skin or sealskin that fastened around the waist with a cord. Without other protection than this the mother carried it on the trail under the fur coat. In very cold weather, however, she generally added warm mittens and socks of any available fur, caribou, marmot, or hare; often, too, a square of fur on the back fastened by two cords, one around the neck and the other around the waist. The baby's front, of course, needed no covering, as it rested directly against the mother's bare back.

As soon as the child was old enough to stand on its feet it received a proper suit of clothing, generally made at first in one piece (Figure 34). The front, as in European combinations, was slit down the middle and laced across; another slit passed between the legs. Each mitten was sewn half-way around the edge of the sleeve, leaving a gap through which the hand could protrude; and there was a hood that pulled up over the head. Sealskin shoes completed the costume, which was naturally doubled in cold weather and augmented by separate outer stockings. Occasionally, a cap was substituted for the usual hood, and a few suits had the slit, not in front, but at the back. Although the usual material was caribou fur, marmot fur was nearly as common in districts where marmots were plentiful, because it did not spoil so readily with dampness.

At the age of about 5 or 6 the child again changed its costume. It now wore a separate coat shaped like its parent's, but often lacking the long tail; combination trousers and stockings held up either by a belt or by a strap over one shoulder; outer stockings reaching to just below the knees; and sealskin shoes. Some of these combination trousers and stockings fitted very tightly, others were broad and flowing. The clothing of a girl at this time was indistinguishable from that of a boy, except that her coat often had the wide shoulders that characterized her mother's coat.[1] Some girls retained this child's costume up to the time of their marriage,[1] but most boys and girls adopted full adult clothing as they approached adolescence. It was quite common for a child to wear an inner suit, all in one piece, beneath an outer suit in which the coat and trousers were separate.

There was seldom any decoration on the outer suit made all in one piece, and such as did occur seemed to consist merely of narrow white bands of caribou fur around the sleeves and possibly elsewhere. Boys' and girls' combination outer trousers and stockings occasionally showed similar white bands. From Coronation Gulf I obtained a girl's combination outer trousers and stockings that had borne two parallel stripes of white fur around each leg just above the ankle. When the fur became worn, however, and the costume shabby, it had been reversed to serve as inner combinations, and decorated down the front of the legs and around the ankles, on the now outer, hairless side, with narrow bands of black and white sealskin similar to those on women's outer stockings (Figure 33). No other inner combination suit, to my knowledge, bore any decoration; this one seemed as unique of its kind as the woman's inner stockings illustrated in Figure 33.

[1] For a photograph showing a marriageable girl in this costume see Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, vol. XII, pt. A, pl. VIII (p. 76A, top right).